Comprehension Questions:

1. When did the Salem witch trials take place, and how many people were accused of practicing witchcraft?

The Salem witch trials took place in colonial Massachusetts between early 1692 and 1693. More than 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft

2. When were the last accusations officially cleared, and who was the last person exonerated?

In 1711, colonial authorities officially cleared the last accused and compensated their families. But it was only in July 2022 that Elizabeth Johnson Jr., the last convicted Salem “witch” whose name hadn't been cleared, was officially exonerated.

3. What are some of the factors that fueled the Salem witch trials, as mentioned in the text?

Some of the factor that fueled the Salem witch trials were: xenophobia, religious extremism and long-brewing social tensions,

4. How did the displacement of people due to the war between England and France contribute to the tensions in Salem?

The displacement of people due to the war placed a strain on Salem’s resources, aggravating the existing rivalry between wealthy and those who depended on agriculture. Controversy also brewed over the Reverend Samuel Parris, who became Salem Village’s first ordained minister in 1689 and quickly gained a reputation for his rigid ways and greedy nature. The Puritan villagers believed all the quarreling was the work of the devil.

5. Who were the first three women accused of afflicting the girls in Salem, and what was the outcome of their interrogations?

Tituba, a Caribbean woman enslaved by the Parris family; Sarah Good, a homeless beggar; and Sarah Osborne, an elderly impoverished woman. During their interrogations Osborne claimed innocence, as did Good. But Tituba confessed, “The devil came to me and bid me to serve him”. She described images and dreams about signing a book and claiming there were other witches in Salem.

6. How did the use of spectral evidence impact the trials, and who advocated against it?

The use of spectral evidence impacted the trials by accusing guilty people who were really innocente. Minister Cotton Mather wrote a letter imploring the court not to allow spectral evidence (testimony about dreams and visions). On October 3, following in his son Cotton's footsteps, Increase Mather, then-president of Harvard, denounced the use of spectral evidence.

7. What actions did Governor William Phips take to halt the trials, and what impact did they have on the accused?

Phips, in response to these pleas and his own wife's questioning as a suspected witch, prohibited further arrests and released many accused witches. He dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer on October 29, replacing it with a Superior Court of Judicature, which disallowed spectral evidence and condemned just 3 out of 56 defendants.

8. How did the Salem witch trials end, and what were the consequences for those involved?

By May 1693, Phips had pardoned all those imprisoned on witchcraft charges. But the damage was already done. 19 and women had been hanged on Gallows Hill. Giles Corey, Martha's, was pressed to death after refusing to submit himself to a trial. At least five of the accused died in jail. Even animals fell victim to the mass hysteria, with colonists in Andover and Salem Village killing two dogs believed to be linked to the devil.

9. What were some of the efforts made to restore the reputation of the accused and acknowledge the wrongful convictions?

- On January 14, 1697, Massachusetts' General Court ordered a day of fasting and soul-searching over the tragedy of Salem.
- In 1702, the court declared the trials unlawful.
- In 1711, the colony passed a bill restoring the rights and good names of many of the accused, as well as granting a total of £600 in restitution to their heirs.
- 1957 Massachusetts formally apologized for the events of 1692.

10. What are some of the enduring legacies and cultural representations of the Salem witch trials in the 20th and 21st centuries, as described in the text?

- Playwright Arthur Miller resurrected the tale with his 1953 play The Crucible, using the trials as an allegory for the anti-communist McCarthyism then sweeping the country.
- Scholars offered up competing explanations for the strange behavior that occurred in Salem.
- Scientists seeking a medical cause for the accusers' afflictions
- Historians ground to their theories in the community's tense sociopolitical environment.